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ABSTRACT

Lexical derivation in the Navajo verb system is described, with examples. Derivation involves four broad processes: (1) straightforward use of verbal roots and adverbial-derivational prefixes, with their base meanings; (2) extension of base root meaning, often by metaphor, to permit application to disparate concepts; (3) figurative use of adverbial-derivational prefixes and prefix compounds; and (4) idiom. Derivational prefixes and their patterns of occurrence are outlined, and patterns signifying extension of meaning of verbal roots are delineated for a number of verbs. It is noted that most of the noun lexicon is derived from verbs, and that some of the stem nouns the ancestral Navajos brought with them from the Northland five centuries ago have undergone changed meaning in the new geographical/ecological environment of the Southwest. Borrowing from English has become more common. (MSE)

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THE DERIVATION OF MEANING IN THE NAVAJO VERB

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In the verb system of Navajo lexical derivation involves four broad processes: (1)the straight forward use of verbal roots and adverbial-derivational prefixes, with their base meanings; (2)extension of base root meaning, often by metaphor, to permit application to disparate concepts; (3)figurative use of adverbial-derivational prefixes and prefix compounds; and (4)idiom.

The Derivational Prefixes: Certain adverbial-derivational prefixes and prefix compounds are used with their base meaning in some lexical derivatives; with figurative meaning in others.

Ha- and ch'í- describe emergence, protrusion or other types of outward momentaneous aspectual action in verbs of motion - possibly the feature that opens the way to their figurative use as inceptive markers in active non-motion verbs; and compound ńdii- (< ń- < ná-: up + -di-: inceptive + -i-: transitional aspect), with the base meaning "up from a surface (as in pick up, get up)" is used figuratively to mark inception in other contexts. Compare base and figurative meaning in:

Base
- Dlǫǫ́' 'a'ęęgéę́' hanoolne': the prairie dog stuck its head up out of the hole.
- 'At'éed bitsoo' shich'į' hayíiłgeed: the girl stuck her tongue out at me.

Figurative
- 'Awéé' háácha: the baby started to cry.
- Tł'éédą́ą́' hááchxiil: last night it started to snow.
- Jį́į́dą́ą́' shimá ha'íítł'ǫ́: my mother started to weave today.

Base
- 'Ashkii 'ólta'dęę́' ch'élwod: the boy ran out of the school.
- Tsésǫ'dęę́' sitsiits'iin ch'íninisht'ą́: I stuck my head out the window.

Figurative
- Hastiin sání ch'í'ílzhiizh: the old man started to dance.
- 'Adą́ą́dą́ą́' ch'íníshnish: I started work yesterday.
- Ch'éénídáán: it's springtime again (spring has re-started)

Base
- Hastą́ądigo ńdiish'nah: I get up at six.
- Łéechąą'í ńdiilwod: the dog sprang up.
- Chą́ą́h dégo'go shizhé'é náshidiiłtį́: when I fell my father picked me up.

Figurative
- Ts'ídá ńdiibį́į́'go béésh halne'é diists'ą́ą́': just as I started to take a bath the telephone rang.
- Táadi 'ahéé'ílkidęęgą́ą́' ńdiishnish: I started working three hours ago.

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Compound dini- (< di-: inceptive + ni-: terminal) describes the prolongation of verbal action - its beginning status is arrested, and as a result it is prolonged in duration.

Shitélii sits'ą́ą́' taah dinoolwod: my burro ran into the water and stayed (wouldn't come out).
'Ashkii 'ółta' gónę' yah 'adinoodzá: the boy went into the school and stayed.

Ha-, in its figurative use as an inceptive marker, is added to prolongative dini- to produce hadini-, a compound that describes the prolongation of the beginning of a verbal action, as:

Tł'éédą́ą́' 'awéé' hadínéeshcha: the baby had a crying spell last night (i.e. it prolonged its starting to cry).

Ńdii-, in its figurative use as an inceptive marker, is recast as a prolongative in the compound ńdíníi-, where the subject is described as "just getting a good start" performing the action denoted by the verb (i.e. the subject is in a state of prolonged inception), as:

Kintahgóó ńdíníisdzáago 'índa shibéeso bizis bénááshnii': I had just gotten a good start on my way to town when I remembered my purse (i.e. my starting to town was in prolonged status when I remembered)
Ts'ídá ńdí'níiłkǫ́ǫ'go shich'ozh dah diik'ą́ą́d: I had just gotten a good start swimming when I got a cramp in my leg.

Compound nikidíníi-, employing niki-: start in lieu of ń- < ná-: up, derives lexical forms with the meaning "prolongedly start to use" = borrow and keep, as:

Sik'is bidzi'izí sha'ní'ą́ą́ ńt'éé' bits'ą́ą́' nikidíníisbą́ą́z: my friend loaned me his bicycle but I just kept it (i.e. I prolongedly started to ride it without his consent).

With substitution of n- < ni-: cessative for the inceptive marker lexical derivatives describe the prolongation of terminal status, as in:

'Adą́ą́dą́ą́' Yootóodi níyáá ńt'éé' ndininisdzą́: I went to Santa Fe yesterday and got stranded (i.e. I remained prolongedly in stopped status. Derived from ninívá: I stopped.)

Ha- (~ ho- ~ hw-) functions, in its base meanings, as a direct object pronoun representing space, area, and 3a (4th) person. (V. IJAL 59:3 The Areal Prefix hɯ- in Koyukon Athapaskan, by Chad Thompson.)

Kóne' honiidoii: it got hot in here (i.e. space - a room - got hot).
Shikin hashdleesh: I'm painting (the side of) my house.
Kintahdi hwiiłtsą́: I caught sight of him/her/them in town.

In particular lexical contexts the meaning of this prefix is extended variously to represent "a sorrow, trouble, disease, event, or condition" and, in some contexts it is a thematic prefix, without discernible meaning.

Sitsilí shihodiiłt'i': my little brother got me into trouble (i.e. he caused "ho-: a trouble" to extend in a thin line and connect to me. Cf. chidí tł'óół bidiiłt'i': I attached a rope to the car.)
'Ádęęh dah hosist'ę́: I committed a wrong or a crime (i.e. I set "ho-" up alongside myself).
Shimá sání bęęh dah hoo'a': my grandmother got sick (i.e. "ho-: a sorrow/disease"took position up alongside my grandmother).
Naa'ahóóhai hahóóyá: the Fair opened (i.e. "ho-: an event" started).
Sik'is yee shił hoolne': my friend told me about it ("ho-: thematic").
Honishłǫ́: I exist ("ho-: thematic").

'A- (~ 'i- ~ -'-) functions, in its base meaning, as a direct object pronoun representing "something or someone unspecified."

'Ashkii 'ayę́: the boy is eating (something).
Shimá bá dah 'asélbaal: I put up an awning for my mother (i.e. I put up something curtain-like for my mother).

In particular contexts 'a- functions to represent the genitalia, and in others it functions as a thematic prefix, without discernible meaning.

'Azee'íił'íní shaa 'anéél'įį' (~ shaa'néél'įį'): the doctor examined my genitals (i.e. he looked at something about me).
Shaa'diniih: I have gonnorhea (i.e. something hurts about me).
'Ashhosh: I'm asleep ("a-: thematic").
'Ashzhish: I'm dancing ("'a-: thematic").

THE VERBAL ROOTS are represented, in the examples that follow, by Stem derivatives identified as Perfective (P.), Progressive (Pr.) or Imperfective (Imp.)

Classic examples of crystallized metaphor in the generation of root polysemy are the roots WOD and CHĄĄ'. WOD has the base meaning "flex, bend," and CHĄĄ' has the base meanings "flee, chase (i.e. cause to flee)."

At some historic period the flexing motion of the legs led to the metaphoric application of WOD to mean "singular subject runs," and reciprocal constructions with the literal meaning "two subjects chase each other" came into use with the meaning "dual subjects run."

In intransitive and transitive Verb Themes constructed with Ø- and ł- classifiers respectively, WOD retains its base meaning "flex/bend."

ØWOD(P): flex, bend łHOD(P): cause to flex, bend

Shijáád 'ahááwod: my hip went out of joint (i.e. it bent apart).
Béésh 'áłts'ózí 'ahááłhod: I broke the wire (by flexing it apart).

A third Theme was constructed with ł-Classifier, to function as the base upon which to derive mediopassives that extend the concept "flex" metaphorically to the subject himself: a singular subject "causes self-flexing" = runs.

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LWOD(P) / ŁWOŁ(Pr.): singular runs

'Ashkii yázhí shaa yílwod: the little boy came running to me (i.e. he arrived "self-flexing").
'Ashkii 'atiinqóó yilwoł: the boy is running along on the road (i.e. he is "self-flexing along").
Bá'ółta'í 'ółta'dęę' ch'élwod: the teacher came running out of the school (he "self-flexed" out).

The verb "run" connotes swiftness, a concomitant meaning that opens the way for application of the "flex-run" Theme to describe the swift movement of inanimate subjects - a use of the metaphor in which "self-flex" obviously plays no part.

Chidí 'atiinqóó yilwoł: the car is running along on the road.
Chidí shił yílwod: I came by car (literally: a car arrived running - moving swiftly - with me)
Yootóodi shił 'ílwod: I traveled to Santa Fe (by swift conveyance) (i.e. something unspecified ran with me).
K'aa' shiqhálwod: the arrow went through me.

Idiom further extends the crystallized metaphor that originated with the meaning "self-flex" in:

Shimá bíká 'eeshwod: I helped my mother (literally: I ran away out of sight after my mother).
'Éé' biih yishwod: I dressed quickly (i.e. I ran into my clothing).
She'esdzą́ą́ bibéeso 'ałtso yiyaa ch'élwod: my wife used up (squandered) all her money (literally: she ran out from under her money).
'Awáalyaaí shíłák'ee haalwod: the jailbird escaped from me (i.e. he ran out of my hand).

And finally, a calque from English is derived by transitivizing the mediopassive Theme - accomplished by adding Ł-Classifier as a causitivizing agent to the LWOŁ Theme, creating a Theme with two classifiers.

Ł-LWOŁ(Pr.)

Díí Bilaqáana naalyéhé bá hooghan yiyoołwoł:this White Man runs a trading post (literally: he causes it to self-flex along. Ł-Classifier does not actually emerge as such in this environment, but its continuing presence is attested by the voiced stem-initial w-; in the absence of Ł-Classifier the stem-initial consonant would be voiceless h-, and the Theme would be ŁHOŁ.

DUAL-RUN also has a metaphoric origin. A full range of lexical derivatives are based on a compound Theme with the meaning "cause to flee" (compound because all of the "flee/chase/run" Themes include a ni-thematic prefix). Compare:

NI-ØCHĄ́Ą́'(P.) / NI-ØCHĘ́Ę́Ł(Pr.): flee

Yisdániichą́ą́': we fled to safety.
Tsé'ą́ą́ góne' yah 'anáíchą́ą́': I fled into a cave.

NI-ŁCHǪ́Ǫ́'(P.) / NI-ŁCHÉÉŁ(Pr.): cause to flee = chase.

Télii ha'ǫǫ́ gó'ǫǫ́ 'anííłchǫ́ǫ́': I chased the burro over the hill.
'Ashkii łééchǫǫ́'í binoołchéél: the boy is being chased by the dog.

The "dual-run" Theme includes the reciprocal object pronoun 'ahi-~ 'ałhi-: each other:

'AHI-NI-LCHǪ́Ǫ́'(P.) / 'AHI-NI-LCHÉÉŁ(Pr.): chase each other; dual (two subjects) run. (L-Classifier is required by the reciprocal object pronoun. 'Ahi- is sometimes construed as the reciprocal form of the null postposition, which has similar shape, and which means "converging together." However, the reciprocal form of the null postposition does not usually require L- or D-Classifier and, convergence does not fit the context.)

'Ashiiké 'atiingóó 'ahinoolchéél: the two boys are running along on the road (literally: they are chasing each other along on the road. Cf. 'ashkii 'at'éél yinoołchéél: the boy is chasing the girl along.)

In the presence of a preceding derivational prefix 'ahi- usually undergoes metathesis to take the form -hi'(a)-, as in:

'Ashiiké 'ółta'dǫ́ǫ́' ch'íhi'neelchǫ́ǫ́' (in lieu of ch'í'ahineelchǫ́ǫ́'): the two boys came running out of the school.
'Ashiiké 'ółta' góne' yah 'ahi'noolchǫ́ǫ́' (in lieu of 'a'ahinoolchǫ́ǫ́'): the two boys ran into the school building.

Again run, with its connotation of swiftness is applied to inanimate subjects that obviously do not "chase each other," as in:

Bee'eldǫǫh bik'a' naakigo chidí bighάhi'neelchǫ́ǫ́': two bullets went through the car. (Cf. 'Ashiiké 'aǹt'i' yighάhi'neelchǫ́ǫ́': the two boys ran through the fence.)

And, like LWOD, dual-run is a constituent of idioms of the type:

Nihimá bíká 'ahi'niilchǫ́ǫ́': we two helped our mother (literally: we ran after her).
'Awáalyaaí shílák'ee hahi'noolchǫ́ǫ́': the two jailbirds escaped from me (i.e. they two ran out of my hand).

Many verbal roots have become polysemantic, appearing with their base meaning in some lexical derivatives; with extended - often metaphoric - meaning in others. Compare base and extended meaning in:

LO'

LO' has the base meaning "act with a rope-like object or loop."

ØLO' / ØLOH(P.)/ ØLO'(Imp.): act with a ropelike object or loop.

Tó bee naakahí hooghan góne' yah 'íílo': I carried the water-bucket into the hogan (by its looped handle).
Béégashii yáázh séloh: I lassoed the calf.

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Sitsilí łóó' hayíílo': my little brother caught a fish (on a line).

With the advent of horse-drawn vehicles the Theme ØLO' was extended to include the meaning "drive," inasmuch as control of the horses was accomplished by means of reins.

Hastiin tsinaabąąs neilo': the man is driving about in the wagon.

Subsequently, with the advent of automobiles and other vehicles the Theme ØLO' was applied with the meaning "drive" despite the absence of a rope-like object or loop.

'Ashkii chidí (dzi'izí, dzi'izítsoh, tsinaa'eeł) neilo': the boy is driving around in a car (bicycle, motorcycle, boat).

Also, historically, ØLO' was applied to a primitive mechanism involving a brake shoe that was brought into contact with the rim of a wagon wheel by the driver, who pulled on a rope. In subsequent years the braking system was improved, with substitution of a lever for the rope, but the Theme ØLO' continued in use to mean "apply a brake," and with the advent of cars and other vehicles ØLO' was again transferred to mean brake.

Tsinaabąąs bídiilo': I applied the brake to the wagon (literally: I brought it into contact against it by means of a rope).
Chidí bídiilo': I applied the car brake.
'Ídiilo': I put on the brake (literally: I brought it into contact with something unspecified by means of a ropelike object or loop).

Again historically, the scales that were first introduced to the Navajo were in the form of balances in which an object to be weighed was placed in one pan and counterbalances were placed in an opposing pan. The two were suspended by a cord and balanced. Accordingly, "weigh" was expressed by a verb construction having the meaning "hang an object up by means of a cord or loop," as:

'Awéé' dah hidiilo': I weighed (hung!) the baby.
Kintahdi dah 'ádiishdlo': in town I weighed (hung!) myself.
'Awáalyaaí dah 'ádiidlo': the prisoner hung (weighed) himself.

A neuter verb with the literal meaning "be in suspended status by means of a cord" carries the meaning "weigh (a specified number of pounds"), as in:

Naakidi neeznádiin dah hidíníshdlo': I weigh two hundred pounds.

And, finally, the Theme ØLO' provides the base for an idiom meaning "cheat, defraud, swindle, trick," as:

Bi'délo': I tricked him (literally: I dangled something on a cord at him).

TÁÁL

The verbal root TÁÁL has the base meaning move the foot abruptly (as in kicking or stepping briskly). It appears in several Verb Themes as:

ØTÁÁL / ŁTÁÁL / ØTAŁ(P.): kick

'Adzíítáál: I let fly a kick (into space)
Tsits'aa' 'ałts'ábíznílłtáál: I kicked the box apart
Ł[ą]' siztał: the horse gave me a kick.

With L-Classifier the Theme is extended to acquire the meanings "stop briskly, dash, move abruptly (as: pulsate, throb, beat)"

LTÁÁL(P.) / LTAL(Imp.)

'Ashkii kin góne' yah 'eeltáál: the boy dashed into the house.
Tsíid hadahaastáál: hot coals popped out (of the fire).
Tsídii shílák'ee haaltáál: the bird jumped out of my hand (got away).
Shijéí dah naaltał: my heart is beating.

The root is further extended in the form of a compound Theme with the meaning "sing." Jeffry Leer (V. YM Analytical Lexicon of Navajo: TÁÁŁ[2]) cites Hupa Ł-TAŁ/TATŁ': "do the kick dance," which suggests a metaphoric origin for the Navajo "sing-Theme"- clearly, it retains no connotation associated with abrupt movement of the foot.

HA-ØTÁÁL(P.) / HA-ØTAAŁ(Imp.): sing.

Hashtaał: I'm singing; hóótáál: I sang.
Sin bee hashtaał: I'm singing (by means of) a song.

The "sing-Theme" is itself extended to describe the conduct of ceremonies, since these events involve singing and chanting.

Hataałii shik'i hóótáál: the Singer sang over me (conducted a ceremony over me).

T'I'

T'I' has the base meaning "extend in a slender line (as an electric line, a fence line, a line of people, a road, a rail)." However, the base Theme is not restricted to tangible things - it is extended to apply to such intangibles as time, space, an activity or institution, a thought or desire, and it appears both in intransitive and transitive form.

ØT'I'(P) / ØT'IH(Pr.) / ØT'I'(Imp.): extend in a slender line.
ŁT'I'(P) / ŁT'IH(Pr.) / ŁT'I'(Imp.): cause to extend in a slender line.

Tséyi'dę́ę́' 'atiin ch'ínít'i': the road extends out from the canyon.
Béésh 'adishahí shighan binázt'i' (biníséłt'i'): a barbed wire extends around my home (I extended a barbed wire around my home).

Intangibles are "extended" in verb constructions and contexts of the type:

'Íhoo'aah nihich'į' háát'i': education was introduced to us (i.e. education began to extend toward us)
'Íhoo'aah baa hwiinít'íníqíí hanáát'i': discussion resumed with regard to education (i.e. it started to re-extend).
Kéyahgóó shíni' 'anáát'i': I long to return to my homeland (i.e. my mind/desire extends back to my homeland).

Shihodiniłt'i': you got me into trouble (i.e. you caused "ho-: a trouble" to extend at me in a slender line).
'Ółta' hótsaaí shíni' bidiit'i': I have my mind set on attending high school (i.e. my mind/desire extends at/connects to high school).
'Anaa' náás yit'ih: the war continues (i.e. war progressively extends forward).
Biqáál dah ńdiit'i': he died (i.e. his faculties started off (back?) in a slender line).
Díí hastiin 'ayóo na'adlo' neiłt'i': this man is crooked and scheming (i.e.he strings trickery/deceit around in a slender line).

'ą́

The root 'ą́ has the base meaning "handle a single roundish, solid or compact object." However, it is the most versatile of the classificatory "handle" verbs, and the most productive for lexical derivation. Actually, its base meaning extends to many objects that do not fit the general definition (it applies to: a ball, rock, egg, melon, loaf of bread, finger ring, hat, shoe, trouser, seed, glove, tent, fried egg), and it is further extended to include a song, word, statement, story, fingerprint, fire, life, date, and a period of time. In addition, 'ą́ describes the apparent movement of the sun (sunrise, noon, sundown).

Ø'ą́/Ø'A'(P.)/Ø'Á(Imp.)/Ø'ÁÁŁ(Pr.): handle a SRO.

Referents are in the basic SRO class in:

Tóshjeeh tł'óó'góó ch'íní'ą́: I carried the barrel outside.
Tsé tsídzáá'ą́: I put the rock into the fire.
Bá'ółta'í nàaltsoos néidii'ą́: the teacher picked up the book

Meaning is variously extended in:

Hataałii sin haidíí'ą́: the Singer started a song.
Shik'ihodii'ą́: he blamed me (i.e. he moved "ho-: a trouble" onto me).
Shąąh dah hoo'a': I got sick (i.e. "ho-: a trouble" moved into position up alongside me).
Yootóodi shiyaa hoo'a': I grew up in Santa Fe (i.e. in Santa Fe space moved into position beneath me).
'Íhoo'aah baa ch'íhoní'ą́: I made a statement regarding education (i.e I carried out "ho-: impersonal "things" about it)

Verb constructions that relate to passage of the day represent the sun by the indefinite subject/object pronoun 'a-~'i-~-'-: something unspecified. Although the indefinite pronoun is generally identified as the subject of "sun-movement" verbs, it could be either subject or object in a construction such as ha'íí'ą́: the sun came up (literally construable either as "something unspecified, solid and roundish, moved up out" or "he moved something solid and roundish up out" (the Sunbearer?)

'I'íí'ą́: the sun went down (i.e. it moved/was moved away out of sight).
'Ałní'ní'ą́: it became noon (i.e. it moved/was moved half way).

"Sun-movement" is extended in derivatives of the type:

Yootóódęęę' nááshdáałgo shee 'i'íí'ę: night overtook me on the way back from Santa Fe (i.e. the sun set with me as I was returning).
'Adęęądęę' shiyoostsah bee 'i'íí'ę: the pawn period expired on my ring yesterday (i.e. the sun set with my ring).
Shich'ijí 'oo'áał: this is my lucky day (i.e. the day is passing on my side; 'oo'áał: something solid and roundish is moving/he is carrying something solid and roundish along = day is passing).
Sits'ęęjí 'oo'áał: this is my unlucky day (i.e.the day is passing on the side opposite me).

A causative-transitive is derived for the "sun-movement" Theme with Ł-Classifier:

Ł'ę(P.): cause sun-movement.

'Adęęądęę' naalyéhé yá sidáhí shiyoostsah sits'ęę' yee 'i'íił'ę: yesterday the trader declared that the pawn period on my ring was up (i.e. he caused the sun to set with it to my disadvantage).

'ę is a constituent in many idioms, such as:

Díí 'éétsoh dah shoo'áał: this coat is too small for me (i.e. this coat holds me up in the air like a solid roundish object - I look like a bundle in it)
Bizéé' dé'ę: I'm plotting against him (i.e. I've started to carry his death along).
Bá'ółta'í saad bił 'ahísíst'ę: I got into a hot argument with the teacher (literally: I rubbed words against each other with the teacher).

A vestigial generic classifier for round shape (ni-) functions as a thematic prefix in verb constructions that relate to the head, as in:

Nanisht'á: I'm moving my head (i.e. my own roundish object) about (and as an extension of this meaning: "I'm delivering an oration." A noun derivative naat'áanii: chief, leader, boss has the literal meaning "the one who makes speeches.")
Tsésǫ'dęęę' ch'íninisht'ę: I stuck my head out the window (i.e. I moved my own solid roundish object out the window).

'Á

The root 'Á has the base meaning "rigid object extends," a meaning that is extended to include subjects other than "rigid objects" in some extended and idiomatic contexts.

Ø'Á: rigid object extends. Ł'Á: cause a rigid object to extend.

'A'ęęądęę' tsin háá'á: a stick protrudes from the hole.

Protrusion is the basis for debt in idiomatic contexts, as:

'Ashdla' béeso shąąh háá'á: I owe five dollars (i.e. five dollars protrude alongside me)

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Bá'ółta'í 'ashdla' béeso shǫǫh hayííł'á: I owe the teacher five dollars (i.e. the teacher has five dollars protruding from alongside me)
Díí 'at'ééd 'aghá 'ádool'á: this girl is greedy, self-centered, selfish (i.e. she extends herself the farthest).

DÁ

DÁ has the base meaning "single subject sits (down)."

Bá'ółta'í shił yah 'ííyáii' neezdá: the teacher came in on me and sat down.

Stem meaning is extended to apply to the landing of an airplane in:

Chidí naat'a'í neezdá: the plane landed.
Na'nízhoozhídi shił 'aneezdá: I landed in Gallup (i.e. something unspecified sat down in Gallup with me).

And the root is extended in the idiom:

Łóó' yǫǫh dah neezdá: the fish bit (i.e. the fish sat down up alongside it - "it" is the baited hook).

DÉÉL

DÉÉL describes the abrupt movement of a slender flexible object (as a rope, belt)

ŁDÉÉL: toss a SFO

Tł'óół bich'į' 'adah 'ííłdéél: I tossed/dropped a rope down to him.

But idiomatically:

Bik'ee 'anááłdéél: I was amazed, "flabbergasted," astounded (i.e. I tossed a SFO back away on account of it).
Shiłį́į́' sits'ǫ́ǫ́' 'anáyííłdéél: my horse "kicked off" on me (i.e. tossed a SFO away to my disadvantage)
Shichidí sits'ǫ́ǫ́' 'anáyííłdéél: my car conked out on me.

DĮĮD

DĮĮD has the base meaning "become none, become non-existent."

(D)DĮĮD: become none.

Chidí bitoo' sits'ǫ́ǫ́' 'ásdįįd: I ran out of gas (i.e. gasoline became none to my disadvantage).

It functions idiomatically in:

'Ashkii nishłínę́ędǫ́ǫ́' shǫǫh 'áhásdįįd: I was orphaned as a boy (i.e. when I was a boy "things" disappeared alongside me)
Bįįh yiiłtsą́ągo t'óó shił 'áhásdįįd: I got excited when I saw the deer (i.e. when I caught sight of the deer "things" merely disappeared with me).

DLÁÁD

DLÁÁD has the base meanings "rip, tear roughly, burst," and Verb Themes that include a di-thematic prefix concerned with fire, derive lexical constructions relating to light.

ØDLÁÁD(P.): rip, tear, burst. ŁDLÁÁD(P.): cause to rip, tear.

Shiqǫǫziz 'íídláád: my sleeve ripped.
Tó bee naakahí bitł'áahdi biqhánídláád: the bucket got a hole in the bottom.
Tł'óół k'ínídláád: the rope broke in two

Root meaning is extended in:

'Aseezį́ binaaltsoos sits'ǫ́ǫ́' k'ínídláád: my newspaper subscription expired (i.e. broke in two).
Shidá'ák'ehdi nihwiyéłdláád: I plowed my field (i.e. I ripped area around on my field).
'Ałní'ní'ǫ́ǫqo 'índa ch'éédi'níłdláád: it was noon before the sun came back out (light ripped back out?)
Bá naashnishíqíí shich'į' 'ák'iyooldláád: my employer flew into a rage at me (i.e. ripped it off himself - skin/clothing).

KAAD

KAAD describes action or status involving "spilling, spreading, scattering, flat expansiveness."

ØKAAD(P.): spread, spill, scatter. ŁKAAD/ŁKAD(P.): cause spreading.

'Abe' bikáá'adání bikáa'qi sikǫ́ǫ́ ńt'éé' naa'ííkaad: the milk that was sitting on the table tipped over and spilled.
Tin bikáá' ndinishtáalqo biqháníkaad: the ice broke with me when I stepped on it.
Sitsilí tó sik'íískaad: my little brother splashed water on me (with his hand).
'Áłchíní shá 'ahídaazkad: the children clapped their hands for me (i.e. they moved "flatness" together" for me).

With the advent of sheep ancestral Navajos became shepherds and the need arose for terminology relating to herding and driving their flocks. Since a flock or herd in composed of a "scattering of units" the root KAAD was an obvious choice, in Verb Themes that include a thematic ni-prefix:

NI-ŁKAAD(Imp./P.): herd, drive a herd, cause to move spreading.

Dibé nanishkaad: I'm herding sheep (i.e. I'm driving them about spreading).
Dibé dibé biqhandǫ́ǫ́' ch'íninílkaad: I drove the herd of sheep out of the corral.(i.e. I caused them to go out spreading).

KAAD provides the base for figurative meaning in the expression:

T'áadoo béeso shá nálwod da lágo biniinaa shǫǫh nahóókaad: I was dismayed when I found that my money didn't arrive (shǫǫh nahóókaad literally: "things" spilled down alongside me).

KID

In its base meaning KID describes movement in a slipping, sliding, gliding, dragging manner.

ŁKID/LKID(Imp./P.): move in a slipping/sliding manner.

'Eii naaltsoos ntsaaígíí shich'į' díłkeed: slide that big book over to me!
Tł'éédą́ą́' béésh bii' kǫ'í bizooł 'ałts'áálkid: the stovepipe slipped apart last night.

With the advent of clocks, thermometers, blood pressure measuring devices,slide shows, movies,cameras, sliding doors and windows, and adjustable valves and gunsights there was a need for the generation of pertinent terminology. The feature that all of these concepts share is the type of movement represented by KID.

The measurement of time by the clock is based on the sliding, circular movement of the hands for passing hours, and on their progressive movement along for the passage of time in a broader sense.

Shichidí binaashnishgo táadi 'ahéé'ílkid: I spent three hours working on my car (i.e. while I worked on my car something went sliding around in a circle three times).
Díkwíígóósh 'oolkił: what time is it? (i.e. toward how many is something sliding along)

The feature chosen to describe slide shows (later extended to include movies) was the lateral sliding movement of the photographic slides.

Tł'éédą́ą́' ch'í'iiskid/'i'iiskid: there was a slide show last night (i.e. something was caused to slide outward/away out of sight last night).

The measurement of temperature and blood pressure is based on the slipping fluctuation of a column of mercury in the measuring device.

Hado neiłkidígíí yaa yilkił: the temperature is going down (i.e. that which heat causes to slide about is sliding downward).
Díkwíígóósh na'ałkid: what's the temperature? (i.e. toward how many is it causing something to slide around)
Na'íłkid: you have a temperature (i.e. you're causing something to slide around).
Shidił wódahgo/wóyahgo/t'áá 'ákohgo na'ałkid: my blood pressure is high/low/just right (i.e. my blood causes something to slide up/down/just right).
Movement of the shutter is the center of attention in:
Nanilnishgo 'anílłkid: I took your picture while you were working.

TLÉÉ'

The root TLÉÉ' applies (1)to the handling of mushy or amorphous matter (mud, wet plaster), and (2)to wetness, in its base meanings.

ØTLÉÉ'(P.): handle mushy matter.

Sitsilí hashtł'ish shik'íízhtłéé': my little brother put (threw) mud on me.
Na'nishkaadqo shee nahóółtą́ąqo nísístłéé': it rained on me while I was out herding so I got wet.

Idiomatic derivatives are drawn from the amorphous nature of the subject in:

Na'ałjidí ch'ah nichxǫ́ǫ́'í léi' bik'idétłéé': the bum has an old battered hat on - i.e. an "amorphous" hat.
Shichidí bikee' sits'ą́ą́' neeztłéé': my car tire went flat.
Chidí sits'ą́ą́' neeztłéé': the car broke down - "conked out" on me.
'Adláanii léi' hooghan gónе' sitłéé': there's a drunkard lying in a heap in the hogan.

The compound Theme HI-(D)TŁÉÉ' describes the plopping movement of a frog, or that of a baby moving about on its rump, as:

Nahóółtą́ągo ch'ał t'óó 'ahayóí ndahatłeehqo yiiłtsą́: when it rained I saw many frogs plopping (hopping) about.

Many idiomatic expressions of a type commonly referred to as "slang" are derived by extension - often metaphoric - of the meaning of verbal roots. (I am indebted to staff members at Navajo Community College for many of those that follow.)(Fig. = figurative.)

DLOOSH: move on all four (a quadruped or person on hands and knees).

Base: | Lį́į́' shił naaldloosh: I'm riding around on a horse (i.e. it is trotting about with me).
Fig. | Tł'éédą́ą́' 'ayóo nił naaldlooshqo niiłtsą́: I saw you with a real "snootfull"(very drunk) last night.

'EEZH: string beads; lead plural.

Base | Shideezhí yoo' shá yizh'eezh: my little sister strung the beads for me.
Fig. | Tł'éédą́ą́' Yootóódóó Bee'aldílldahsinilji' chidí shé'eezh: last night I passed every car on the road between Santa Fe and Albuquerque (i.e. I strung them like beads).

GHAŁ: move in an undulating, rolling manner.

Base | Tł'éédą́ą́' náheeshqhałqo siiskǫ́: I rolled and tossed all night last night (i.e. I rolled over and over).
Fig. | Bá neiilnishíqíí 'ayóo náhoolghał: the guy we work for is inconsistent - he's first one way, then another, he "waffles."

JOŁ: handle non-compact matter. A Theme -'a-Øjoł / -'a-Øjooł describes the drifting movement of fog, smoke, a cloud or a stench.

Base | Halgaidi łid na'ajooł: smoke is drifting about down on the plain.
Fig. | Bá neiilnishíqíí 'ayóo ha'ałjoł: the guy we work for is a real blowhard (talks too much) (literally: he emits foq[?])

KAŁ/KAL: bat, bump, whack, chop.

Base | Doo deighánígóó jooł sínikał: you batted the ball a long way.
Fig. | Niyooch'ííd bidííniidgo bizkał: it made him mad when I called him a liar (i.e. it whacked him).
'Ółta' binant'a'í doo 'akal da: the school Superintendent doesn't have any clout - he's a wimp (doesn't whack).

K'AIH: move or walk spread-legged.

Base | Hastiin sání 'atiinqóó 'oołk'aih: the old man is walking spread-legged along the road.
Fig. | Hastiin sání tódiłhił yik'ee 'oołk'aih: the old man has a snootful of whiskey (i.e. he's walking along spread-legged because of whiskey)

K'ĄĄD: form an angle, slope, slant, be on edge.

Base | Tsits'aa' diiłk'ąądgo biyaa qóne' désh'ɬį́': I tilted the box and looked under it.
Fig. | 'Ashiiké 'ałch'į' diik'ąąd: the two boys squared off at each other (to fight - they "tilted" toward each other).
'At'éédłéi' ha'oołk'ąąłgo yiiłtsą́: I saw some pregnant girl going along (i.e. she is going along humped).
'Ahéédhéshɬį́hdi naasháago 'ayóo shił hodíik'ąąd: I got very lonesome (homesick) living in California (i.e. "ho-: 'things'" turned on edge with me).

LÁ: move or handle a slender flexible object, objects that come in pairs or - in some usages - plural objects.

Base | Siziiz n'diilá: I took down my belt (as from a shelf or hook).
Fig. | Naakaii bizaad sizayíílá: he taught me Spanish (i.e. he put Spanish words into my mouth).
'Awáalya qóne' yah 'ashi'doolt'e'go biniinaa she'esdzáán shá neizlá: my wife gave me hell because I got put in jail (literally: she carried it around for me)
Hastiin sání bá yooléełgo sitɬ: the old man lies with a hangover (literally: it's carrying it along for him)
Dichin shá neilé: I'm hungry (i.e. hunger is carrying it around for me).
Tódiłhił yiyaa ch'íiníłá: he squandered everything he had on liquor (literally: it carried it out from under him).

LÁ (ŁXÁ): hate.

Base | Naa'ołí 'ayóo jooshłxá: I really hate beans.
Fig. | Naa'ołí 'ayóo shijoołxá: beans do not agree with me (i.e. beans hate me).

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MAS: globularity, roll, move in a circular manner.

Base | Naa'ahóóhai bijáád 'ak'áán bénásmas: I'm rolling a chicken leg in flour.

Fig. | Nit'a' yiiłmas: hurry up! Shake a leg! (i.e. give your wing a shake!)

NIL: move or handle plural objects.

Base | Naaltsoos ni' ninínil: I set the books down.

Fig. | Naghái 'at'éédbináá' shik'i niinínil: that girl there is staring at me (i.e. she set her eyes on me).

NIIH: taste.

Base | Díí ta'neesk'ání doo halniih da: this melon has no taste - it's insipid.

Fig. | Díí na'alkidí doo halniih da: this movie is not interesting - it's a bore (i.e. it's tasteless).

TL'Ǫ: tie, tether.

Base | Tł'ízí tsin bąąh dah hátł'Ǫ: I tied the goat to a tree.

Fig. | Tó nihá dah haastł'Ǫ: water was developed for us (i.e. tethered).

Yɬ: move or handle a load or burden.

Base | Chidítsoh kin bitsɬįgi łeejin yayiiyɬ: the truck dumped a load of coal by the house.

Fig. | Naat'áanii biyooch'íid shik'i yayiiyɬ: the boss gave me a real snow-job - he dumped a load of lies on me.
| Naalyéhé yá sidáhí shijeeh yiyíiyɬ: the trader told me a pack of lies (i.e. he put it - a load - into my ear).

ZǪǪS: tear, rip,pull.

Base | Naak'a'at'ąhí k'ínízǪǪz: I ripped the cloth in two.

Fig. | Tł'éédąąą' niye' chidí bił naanáyoozǪǫsqo viiłtsą: I saw your son zooming around in the car last night.
| Chidí léi'.shíighah ch'íinízǪǪz: a car zoomed past me.

ZHA': hook, snag, flip (with a pointed object).

Base | Tł'iish tsits'aa' bii'dęęą' háásha': I flipped the snake out of the box (as with a stick).

Fig. | Hastiinęę deeteel yáábí'iisha': the man "kicked off" (died - i.e. "broad horns" flipped him into the air).

The foregoing examples illustrate the principal processes involved in the derivation of meaning in the Navajo verb system - processes that enable the language to generate a virtually limitless vocabulary from a reservoir of about 550 verbal roots.

Apart from a relatively small corpus of non-culture related root and stem nouns most of the noun lexicon is derived, in one way or another, from verbs; and some of the root / stem nouns that the ancestral Navajo brought with them from the Northland some five centuries ago appear to have undergone changed meaning in the new geographical-ecological environment of the American Southwest.

A case in point is Navajo nooh / noo', presumably derived from underlying noh*, which is no longer in use. Like taah: into water and taa': inside water, derived from ta-: water by adding -iih: into and -ii': inside of, respectively, nooh appears to consist of noh* + -iih, and noo' is a combination of noh* + -ii'. Cognates are widely distributed among Northern Athapaskan languages (cf. Sarsee and Chipewyan nuu, Carrier nuuh), deriving in turn from Proto-Athapaskan nu* (Jeffry Leer), and all with the meaning "island."

Islands are not commonplace in the Southwest, but the noun survived in the forms nooh and noo', with the meanings "into a cache or concealed hiding place" and "in a cache or concealed hiding place" respectively. Thus: hazéétsʼósí nástáán yiiʼ neeshchʼííʼ nooh yishchį́: the chipmunk cached nuts in the log / hazéétsʼósí bineeshchʼííʼ nooʼ siyį́: the chipmunks nuts are cached away (i.e. they lie in a cache). And nooʼ functions also as a noun with the meaning "cache, hiding or storage place," as in Tséyiʼ qóyaa dabinooʼ ʼádayiilaa: they built secret storage places down in Canyon de Chelley.

Although metaphor is not as widely used with nouns as it is with verbs, the parts of a vehicle and certain other inanimate things are identified with body parts, as:

chidí biqaan (car's arm): front wheel.
chidí bijáád (car's leg): rear wheel.
chidí bijéí (car's heart): car battery.
chidí bikeeʼ (car's shoe): car tire.
chidí bikeeʼ bikékał (car's shoe sole): tire tread.
chidí bitsiitsʼiin (car's head): car motor.
chidí binááʼ (car's eyes): car's headlights.
chidí bíchį́į́shkʼǫ́ǫ́h (car's nose end): car's hood or front end.
béésh biiʼ kǫʼí bizooł (stove's windpipe): stovepipe.
beeʼeldǫǫh bijaaʼ (gun's ear): gun hammer.

Again, the neuter verb siqan: it is dried up, and ʼasqan: something is dried up, are used as nouns, taking the shape -sqą', as in:

ʼasqą': dried up remains; dried hide, hulk; stump.
bisqą': its dried up remains.

dibé bisqą': dried sheepskin.
chidí bisqą': car hulk.
tsin bisqą': snag tree, dead tree.
béeso bisqą': trade token. (Formerly issued by traders in payment for wool, blankets, pinyon nuts and other Navajo products. Redeemable only at the place of issue, they were assurance to the trader that the Navajo customer would not go elsewhere to spend the money he or she received.)(Literally. dried up remains of money.)

The derivational process involved is generally a descriptive one, ranging from nominalized verbs of the type hataałii (< hataał: he sings + -ii: the one), singer, medicine man to phrases such as kǫ' na'ałbąąsii bitiin biyaa naaznilígíí: railroad tie (literally: those that lie beneath the railroad track)

Historically, Navajo borrowed few terms from surrounding languages; in modern times, however, there is a tendency on the part of bilinguals to substitute words and phrases in English for alien concepts that would require extended descriptive language in Navajo.